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**A descriptive study of teachers' perceptions of skills currently utilized for effective parent-teacher conferences and those skills teachers feel are needed for effective parent-teacher conferencing**

Marlene Fritz

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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SKILLS  
CURRENTLY UTILIZED FOR EFFECTIVE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES  
AND THOSE SKILLS TEACHERS FEEL ARE NEEDED FOR  
EFFECTIVE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCING

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A Project  
Presented to the Faculty of  
The School of Education  
California State University  
San Bernardino

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by  
Marlene Fritz  
1986

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Approved by:

[Redacted Signature]

Advisor

1/29/86  
Date

[Redacted Signature]

Committee Member

1/29/86  
Date

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

For many teachers, the most exasperating period of their work year is not the multitude of papers to be corrected, or the endless lesson plans, or the discipline problems, rather it is the parent-teacher conference that proves to be the most exasperating period of the work year. The parent conference is the job for which the teacher feels least well-prepared by course work and training. Be it college or in the work place, teacher preparation offers little or no training in conducting parent-teacher conferences. Teachers are often left to their own devices in learning about and conducting such conferences. Because of this, some teachers have parent conferences only when they are required. Others feel, however, that they cannot possibly do as effective teaching as they want to do without knowing and talking with the parents.

The first contact with the parents of a student who may need some form of special help is probably the most important of all because that telephone call or face-to-face confrontation may be the first time anyone at school has told the parents that a problem exists. Therefore, the initial response of the parents and the teacher's reaction to that first response is likely to set the tone for all future work. The initial contact is clearly that time when a careful, considerate, and skillfull approach can prevent many hours of unnecessary frustration, mistrust, and antagonism (Losen & Diamant, 1978). It may determine whether parents see teachers and themselves as allies or adversaries.

But what should be a teacher's first mode of response? What should



the teacher say or do during the conference? What can the parent's reactions and words reveal about the problem, and can they, the parents, help? A conference can be one of the most helpful and productive of all techniques, but a good conference does not just happen (Black & Nicklas, 1980). A good conference is where parents and teachers learn from each other and come to regard each other as associates and allies (Borsch, 1969).

The ideal conference is one in which the teacher assumes the dual role of teacher and learner. A teacher teaching the parents something additional about understanding their child and the dynamics of the child in class, and a learner in that the teacher receives data and asks the question, "What did I learn from this encounter that I did not know before?"

The teacher is the controlling factor in the parent-teacher conference. The teacher needs to contend with the multitude of variables that may become part of the conference be they positive or negative. The teacher needs to be aware of the effects parent-teacher conferences have on the parents and the emotions that may or may not result. The teacher must develop skills in bringing out and handling these emotions (Black, 1979), and in gaining insight into parent's own perceptions about their role as parents, their assumptions about their children, and their expectations for that particular child (Losen, 1978). It is with knowledge of such skills in conducting successful conferences that teacher's confidence will be enhanced and confidence and success gained (McSweeney, 1983).

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' perceptions as to those skills currently utilized by teachers for effective parent-teacher conferences and those skills teachers feel are needed for effective parent-teacher conferencing. The review of the literature and the teacher questionnaire will look at the question of parent-teacher conferences; suggestions for more effective parent-teacher conferences; teachers' perceptions of their present conferencing skills; and what teachers perceive as needing for more effective parent-teacher conferences. These factors will then be assimilated and conclusions made, along with summary, discussion, and recommendations.

It would be appropriate, at this time, to define those terms the reader might concern themselves with as they read this study.

Parent-teacher conferences are meetings which concentrate on those face-to-face confrontations held between parents and teachers during the school year. The literature, however, is applicable to other venues of parent-teacher communication such as telephone conversations, informal meetings, and letters.

Effective parent-teacher conferences refer to those communications between parents and teacher resulting in the common goal of what is best for the child. It is communication between allies and associates. Allies working to form a strong partnership and associates listening and learning from one another. It is communication come about through preparation, attending, respect, empathy, negotiation, and toleration (Lockavitch, 1983).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature covers six major areas. All six areas encompass those areas considered to be important in parent-teacher conferences. The six areas discussed are preparation, attending, respect, empathy, negotiation, and toleration.

The parent-teacher conference is an integral part of the school program and the strongest link in the chain connecting home and school (McDaniel, 1948). How favorably a child can adjust to the school environment, how well he can develop in knowledge, skills, and attitudes; how successfully he can work and play with his peers, how fully he can contribute to the whole life around him, all depend upon mutual understanding of parents and school personnel (McDaniel, 1948). Black and Nicklas (1980) feel that a successful parent-teacher conference is a powerful public relations tool and every effort should be made to make the process as effective as possible. They feel that every effort should be made to utilize parent-teacher conferences more efficiently, for the effective conference pays unlimited dividends to the teacher, the parent, and most importantly to the child.

Judy Lambana (1982) states that parent-teacher conferences offer one of the most effective means of strengthening the home and school relationship while serving to exchange information, solve problems, and make educational plans for an individual student. The parent and the teacher share the common goal of guiding the child in the direction of becoming a human person who values themselves and other individuals and

who is capable of participating in the society to create a better life for all the people of the world (Switch, Hobson, & Duff, 1979).

The literature abounds with the merits of parent-teacher conferences. How they can improve relationships between the school and home, how they can improve the child's school experiences, and how they can serve to enhance achievement. Despite all this, Wallbrown and Prichard (1978) found that parent conferencing was not a popular topic with researchers, theoreticians, or teachers. In a survey conducted by them, 84% of the teachers surveyed felt a need to improve their skills in conducting parent conferences. If that be the case, what need a teacher do in order to improve their skills in conducting parent-teacher conferences?

Lockavitch (1983), in looking at the problem of successful parent-teacher conferences and ways to make parent-teacher conferences less stressful and productive found that those teachers integrating the interpersonal communication skills of preparation, attending, respect, empathy, negotiation, and toleration would improve their parent-teacher conferences.

#### Preparation

According to Black and Nicklas (1980), one of the qualities of a successful parent-teacher conference is that professionally planned and organized time when the teacher and parent can meet to discuss a student's educational progress. It is during this time that attitudes are easily formed so planning and effective preparation are indispensable if the conference is to be successful (McDaniel, 1948).

Preparation involves providing a private, uninterrupted session that is friendly and relaxed (Long, 1978). Lond adds, that after beginning with a friendly or welcoming remark, that the teacher outline at the outset those areas of the child's performance or background that will most likely be covered so that the parents have an idea of what will be stressed and when and where to introduce topics they may wish to raise. How one introduces oneself is, of course, a matter of personal style and will vary with circumstances, but Losen and Diamant (1978) feel brevity and purposiveness are the best. They also feel it is important for the teacher, at this time, to establish the idea that the conference is one in which the parents will be able to explore some matters and gather information.

McDaniel (1948), in an article on effective home-school relationships, emphasizes the need to plan carefully each conference. McDaniel, like Long, suggests the teacher signify the point to be discussed, become familiar with the child's cumulative records, review the child's behavior characteristics, prepare a folder of the child's work, and have copies of study material on hand for the parents to see. Having on hand representative samples of the child's work, best, worst, and most characteristic, engages the parents in a positive discussion about the child before discussing the child's current work or problems.

Studying the child's cumulative records, planning in advance to cover specific areas of the child's background or educational history that seem pertinent, and listing the points to be covered for reference

in case the meeting becomes sidetracked, are another of those preparations that Long (1978) feels contribute to a successful parent-teacher conference. In the article, "How to Talk to Parent and Get the Message Home" (Weidig & Green, 1974), the authors encourage samples of child's work but in addition also recommend those added preparation factors of accomodating work schedules, beginning the conference with a positive statement, and taking special effort to make the conference area comfortable and relaxing for all involved. Langdon and Stout (1954) feel it is friendly and courteous to think of what can be done to make parents comfortable while they are there. Details of where to sit, what chairs to use, lighting, ventilation, and so forth, are important because they have a great bearing on physical comfort.

Preparation is important for the success of the parent-teacher conference. The more the better. It is the time for writing down reasons for the conference, collecting supportive data, and making material understandable to the parent (Lockavitch, 1983). It is the time for getting ideas together. A time for one to be up to date on all the information about the child that is at hand; child's school living; questions to ask; suggestions to offer (Langdon & Stout, 1954). It is the teacher's preparation that sets the tone and course of the parent-teacher conference.

### Attending

Another key to the parent-teacher conference is the willingness to talk and listen to one another in order to seek and understand the reasons behind a child's behavior (Auten, 1981). It is a time of mutual

problem solving involving active listening, open questions, and personalization. Lockavitch (1983) feels it involves looking at verbal and non-verbal messages, asking for clarification, leaning forward, maintaining eye contact, and listening actively. Langdon (1954) sees it as listening that is active, dynamic, and vital. The very willingness to listen comes out of a feeling that the parents have much to give. It indicates a belief that there is something to be learned from them and a readiness to learn. It speaks, more loudly than words of an interest in what they have to say. It tells of the teacher's respect for the parents.

Robert R. Carkhuff (1973) believes one must attend physically, psychologically, and listen to effect effective communication. Long (1978) stresses listening as does Borsch (1969) when he says that teachers must rely upon the ability to adapt conversationally to the comments of the parent and become a reader of clues.

Carkhuff (1973) defines listening as the ability to give full and individual attention. A good listener will listen for a reason, be non-judgemental, resist distractions, and wait to respond. In listening, one should look for themes and consider and reflect on what is being said. Don't jump to conclusions. A teacher's first guess about how parents feel, what they are going to say, or why they did what they did may be right; but it may not, too. Better to wait and listen instead of being too sure.

By attending physically, one communicates interest. How one postures oneself is a critical part of attending. One way to attend is to

face the parent fully and lean forward. In so doing, one tends to think of the person one is attending to. By showing genuine interest in what the parents have to say, and by feeling genuine interest in what the parents have to say, and by feeling genuine interest, it is easy to show interest. There will be no fidgeting then with things on the desk, and no sitting on the edge of the chair impatiently waiting to get in one's own say-so. The things the parents speak of may be the very clue that the teacher needs for better understanding the child.

Maintaining eye contact is the key to attending psychologically (Carkhuff, 1973). In doing so, the teacher communicates attentiveness, a willingness to listen, and interest in what is being said. In the use of eye contact, the teacher has the opportunity to observe cues; cues to the internal behaviors of the parent.

### Respect

The effective parent-teacher conference involves people who have an open, honest, and mutually respectful partnership. It is for the teacher to establish rapport and an attitude of respect for parental opinion (McDaniel, 1948). Respect, as an interpersonal communication skill, involves the teacher use of everyday language. Losen and Diamant (1978) ask that teachers avoid professional jargon and try to communicate simply but accurately in language appropriate to the parents' educational, social, and cultural background. Langdon and Stout (1954) concur in that a teacher should avoid teacherish language. When talking with parent as friend-to-friend, there is no reason to talk any way but naturally and in the words that express one's meaning clearly and



simply.

Parents are worthy of respect and should be treated as professional child raisers (Lombana, 1982) and as associates and allies (Borsch, 1969). Langdon and Stout (1954) feel a teacher should be ready to speak honest admiration for what the parents do. Parents can usually use plenty of encouragement. Often a teacher feels admiration for things parents do, but in the hurry it does not get said. It is thoughtful to mention it because most parents have moments of doubt and discouragement in bringing up their children. A word from the teacher can be a big lift.

A show of respect requires the teacher and parents to be supportive of each other. In so doing, they provide the child with the highest quality environment to develop themselves in the most positive way (Switch, Hobson, & Duff, 1979). This is the time, according to Losen and Diamant (1978), to reinforce and encourage the parents' continuing to take an active interest in their child's school experience. A teacher should be ready to explain what is done at school and why it is done (Langdon & Stout, 1954). Langdon and Stout (1954) feel this is recognition of the parents' right to know what goes on at school. In a way it expresses the teacher's willingness to have the parents' comments about what is done. It suggests respect for their opinion about it all. It is the evidence to the parents that what is done is done with a reason.

A mark of respect is to take what the parents say seriously. It is an expression of one's recognition that, whatever it is, it has importance because they wanted to say it (Langdon & Stout, 1954). Things

are not to be taken lightly or facetiously, or brushed off as of no importance. When parents feel that a teacher accepts them as they are, shows them respect, they will bring up their problems - the things which worry them, the things about which they want some help, and the things that baffle them. Langdon and Stout (1954) also stress the respect of the parents' reserve. This suggests dropping a subject when it is obvious that the parents do not want to discuss it. It may be something that seems very important to the teacher, perhaps something that seems likely to be at the bottom of some difficulty the child is having. It may be something that the teacher feels should be got out in the open or something that the teacher feels a wonder about. Even so, Langdon and Stout (1954) feel that parents will appreciate the respect for their reserve that prevents either prodding or prying.

Perhaps the key to respect is to accept (Langdon and Stout, 1954). The accepting of the parents as they are, the accepting of oneself, the accepting of the children, and the accepting of the situation. This does not mean a blind, resigned, long suffering acceptance, but an acceptance that sees things as they are, without blame for their being that way and without recriminations because they are that way (Langdon & Stout, 1954).

### Empathy

To relate what parents do and say to the way they feel, and to accept their feelings without blame or condemnation is a quality Langdon and Stout (1954) feel is important to successful parent-teacher conferences. It is the parent's right to have certain feelings, and to look

upon it as reasonable that they should be whatever they are (Langdon & Stout, 1954).

Teachers will find that an exchange of feelings can be beneficial for a successful meeting (McSweeney, 1983). The teachers very manner in talking things over, in listening to suggestions, and in being ready to consider how things might be worked out tells more clearly than words that the matter of making adjustments is no one-sided affair and that the teacher is ready to do some of it, too, if need be (Langdon & Stout, 1954).

#### Negotiation

Negotiation requires open communication and give and take (Lockavitch, 1983). It involves tact and diplomacy, and looking at alternative actions, consequences, desirable actions, and ways actions can be carried out (Auten, 1981).

Negotiation provides the unique opportunity for teachers and parents to exchange ideas and information (Rabbitt, 1978), and for teachers and parents to share the responsibility by cooperating in the planning, execution of the planning and evaluation of the results (McDaniel, 1948).

#### Toleration

Toleration involves teachers avoiding showing disappointment or implying criticism of the parent (McDaniel, 1948). Langdon and Stout (1954) say there are many things brought up in a parent-teacher conference that may elicit surprise or even shock to the teacher who has different ideas than those expressed by the parent. A teacher needs to

be accepting of the fact that there are all sorts of ways of living and doing and thinking and feeling, and of taking whatever is revealed with no blame or condemnation for the parent (Langdon & Stout, 1954). Langdon and Stout (1954) feel that it is when a teacher can reach the point where there is no necessity for sitting in judgement or deciding what is right or what is wrong, that toleration comes in.

### Summary

Participation, attending, respect, empathy, negotiation, and toleration - interpersonal communication skills to effect more successful parent-teacher conferences (Lockavitch, 1983). All the do's and don't's of parent-teacher interviewing that might be mentioned are nothing more than the things that will occur to one to do or not to do when one really wants to be friendly and courteous and kindly and considerate (Langdon & Stout, 1954). They are ways of doing that which comes naturally when one feels a genuine respect for parents and confidence in their intent to do the right things by their children; when one really wants to be friends with them.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions as to those skills currently utilized for effective parent-teacher conferences and those skills teachers feel are needed for more effective parent-teacher conferences.

##### Subjects

A total of fifty Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS), Germany Region teachers participated in this study. Fifteen of these participants were from the Darmstadt American Middle School; seven each from the Mannheim and Bad Kreuznach American Elementary Schools; six from the Mannheim American Middle School; five from the Bueren American Elementary School; four from the Pirmasens American Elementary School; and three each from the Heidelberg and Ramstein American High Schools.

##### Instruments

All participants completed a questionnaire that was used for the collection of data in this study.

The questionnaire, developed by this researcher, consisted of a Likert-type scale of sixteen variables each describing a different parent-teacher conferencing activity (see appendix C). The first three variables dealt with activities of the teacher before the conference and the next thirteen dealt with activities of the teacher during the conference.

Teachers were asked to describe their degree of participation in

each activity on a five point scale ranging from 1 - all of the time, 2 - most of the time, 3 - some of the time, 4 - hardly ever, and 5 - never. In the data analysis, a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to provide comparisons and descriptions of conferencing activities. The package utilized by this researcher caused a histogram to be printed for each variable preceded by the variables frequency table and followed by associated statistics such as mean, standard error, median, mode, standard deviation, variance, kurtosis, skewness, range, minimum, and maximum.

In addition to the Likert-type questions, the questionnaire also asked teachers to respond to three open-ended questions regarding parent-teacher conferences (see appendix C). It was the purpose of these questions to provide subjective responses, additional input, and more accurate and personal perceptions of the parent-teacher conference.

### Procedure

The participating teachers were contacted individually and were told that participation in the study was on a voluntary basis and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting this researcher (see appendix A).

Each participant received a packet consisting of an introductory letter (see appendix A), a consent form (see appendix B), and a questionnaire (see appendix C). After the questionnaire was completed, the teacher returned the questionnaire and the signed consent to this researcher.

### Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. First was the difficulty in obtaining the study results in a timely manner. The geographical distances of the participants involved use of the local mail system resulting in long delays. Secondly, the lack of computer and statistical packages was a factor again resulting in delay.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study, as stated in Chapter I, has been to explore teachers' perceptions as to those skills currently utilized for effective parent-teacher conferences and those skills teachers feel are needed for more effective parent-teacher conferences. All of the participants used in the study answered the questionnaire completely resulting in fifty valid cases for each of the sixteen variables.

The data in this study was subject to several types of statistical analysis. A Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used to provide comparisons and descriptions of conferencing activities. The package caused a histogram to be printed for each variable, a frequency table for each, and associated statistics such as mean, standard error, median, mode, standard deviation, variance, kurtosis, skewness, range, minimum, and maximum. This chapter will present the results using the highest relative frequency (percent) for each of the sixteen variables in the following order: (1) skills teachers indicated they used all of the time before a conference, (2) skills teachers indicated they used most of the time before a conference, (3) skills teachers indicated they used all of the time during a conference, (4) skills teachers indicated they used most of the time during a conference, and (5) skills teachers indicated they used some of the time during a conference.



### Skills Teachers Indicated They Used All of the Time Before a Conference

Table 1 presents the highest relative frequencies (percentages) of those skills teachers indicated they used all of the time before a conference. The skills of collecting supportive data and providing a private place for the conference scored 56% and 58% respectively.

### Skills Teachers Indicated They Used Most of the Time Before a Conference

Table 2 presents the highest relative frequency (percentage) for those skills teachers indicated they used most of the time. Writing down the reasons and topics to be covered in a conference scored the highest with 60%.

### Skills Teachers Indicated They Used All of the Time During a Conference

Table 3 presents those skills teachers utilized all of the time during a conference. Those skills found to be used by the majority of teachers all of the time were making a concerted effort to welcome the parents and making them feel at ease (70%), communicating teacher concerns to the parent (68%), and allowing for parents to offer suggestions (52%).

### Skills Teachers Indicated They Used Most of the Time During A Conference

Table 4 presents the scores of those skills teachers perceived to be used most of the time during a conference. Maintaining eye contact was at the top with 68%, enjoying the conference was second with 66%, and being aware of the parent's fears and concerns tied with asking for parent information with 58%.

### Skill Teachers Indicated They Used Some of the Time During a Conference

Table 5 presents the percentages of those skills the majority of

TABLE 1

Skills Teachers Indicated They Used All of the Time  
Before a Conference

Skill	Relative Frequency (%)
Collect supportive data	56%
Provide a private place for the conference	58%

TABLE 2

Skills Teachers Indicated They Used Most of the Time  
Before a Conference

Skill	Relative Frequency (%)
-------	------------------------

Write down the reasons and topics to be  
covered in the conference.

60%

TABLE 3

Skills Teachers Indicated They Used All of the Time  
During a Conference

Skill	Relative Frequency (%)
Welcome parents and make them feel at ease	70%
Communicate concerns to the parent	68%
Allow for the parents to offer suggestions	52%

TABLE 4

Skills Teachers Indicated They Used Most of the Time  
During a Conference

Skill	Relative Frequency (%)
Maintain eye contact	68%
Have an enjoyable conference	66%
Be aware of parent's fears and concerns	58%
Ask for parent information	58%
Start conference positively	56%
Work with parents to develop a plan of action	50%
Eliminate barriers between the parents and teacher	38%

TABLE 5

Skills Teachers Indicated They Used Some of the Time  
During a Conference

Skill	Relative Frequency (%)
Lean Forward	56%
Ask open-ended questions	54%
Provide comfortable chairs	36%

teachers perceived to be used some of the time. Leaning forward and asking open-ended questions were close have 56% and 54% respectively. The providing of comfortable chairs was third with 36%.

### Summary

The aforementioned results obtained by the sixteen Likert-type questions indicated that teachers are exhibiting effective parent-teacher conferencing skills either all of the time, most of the time, or some of the time.

The majority of teachers, as shown by Tables 1 and 3, perceive themselves as exhibiting those skills of collecting supportive data, providing a private place for the conference, welcoming parents and making them feel at ease, communicating their concerns to the parent, and allowing for the parents to offer suggestions all of the time.

Tables 2 and 4 show that teachers perceive themselves as showing those skills of writing down the reasons for the conference, maintaining eye contact, having an enjoyable conference, being aware of the parent's concerns, asking the parent for information, starting the conference positively, working with parents to develop a plan of action, and eliminating barriers between the parents and teacher most of the time.

Those skills teachers indicated they used some of the time were leaning forward, asking open-ended questions, and providing comfortable chairs.

The results of the questionnaires bring out the fact that the

majority of teachers indicated using all of the skills at least some of the time. None of the skills were indicated, by the majority, as to being used hardly ever or never.



## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION

The goal of a parent-teacher conference is that of guiding the child in the direction of becoming a human person who values themselves and other individuals and who is capable of participating in the society to create a better life for all people of the world (Switch, Hobson, & Duff, 1979).

In answer to the question "The most important goal I would like to have a parent-teacher conference accomplish is ...", this researcher would like to share with the reader several responses.

"...establish a partnership with the parents by showing them my concerns and need for their support to work effectively with their child."

"...establish and maintain a common goal: what is best for the student."

"...to let the parent know that the school is an 'open' place where the parent and teacher can and should work together to further the child's welfare."

"...to make the parents aware that teacher and parents need to cooperate and follow through on plans of action for the student."

A common thread in all the responses is that of the student. The effective conference will pay unlimited dividends to the teacher and the parent, but most importantly pay unlimited dividends to the child.

This chapter will present the information in the following order:

(1) the discussion of the findings, (2) recommendations, and (3) concluding remarks.

### Discussion of the Findings

To help direct the discussion toward important aspects, the major purpose and findings of the study will be reiterated. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions as to those skills needed for more effective parent-teacher conferences and those skills currently utilized by teachers for effective parent-teacher conferences. A questionnaire was used to determine teachers' current use of skills and to also gain some subjective responses and personal perceptions to three open-ended questions.

The findings indicated that the majority of teachers are utilizing those skills Lockavitch (1983) found necessary for an effective parent-teacher conference: preparation, attending, respect, empathy, negotiation, and toleration.

The finding of this investigation support previous studies - that preparation is important for the success of the parent-teacher conference (Lockavitch, 1983; McDaniel, 1948). Preparation being that time for writing down reasons for the conference, collecting supportive data, making material understandable to the parent, and making the parent comfortable (Lockavitch, 1983) were indicated by 60% of the teachers as being necessary for an effective conference.

A teacher responding to the question "What suggestions or comments would you offer as ways to meet the challenge of facilitating a more effective parent-teacher conference?" adamantly answered:

"Be prepared - know your objective and steps to obtain results so parents can weigh and make decisions on a plan of action."

The findings also supported Lockavitch's (1983) idea that those teachers integrating the interpersonal communication skills of attending, respect, empathy, negotiation, and toleration would improve their parent-teacher conferences. In all cases, teachers perceived themselves as incorporating these skills in their parent-teacher conferences at least some of the time. In answer to the question of ways to facilitate more effective parent-teacher conferences, this researcher would like to share with the reader some teacher insights.

"Always keep the needs/feelings of the parent in the front of your mind. The child must ultimately have top priority."

"Active listen to parents and treat them with the respect due them."

"Listen! Listen! Listen! To the child. To the parent. To your colleagues. To yourself."

"Mention positive attitudes and characteristics of the student in question."

"My best conferences are the ones where I am honest and direct in dealing with the parent."

All of the responses above show a deep sense of willingness to work with the parent in a honest, open, and admiring manner.

### Recommendations

In this section, recommendations are discussed. The main finding of this study was that the majority of teachers are currently utilizing some factors found to achieve successful parent-teacher conferences at least some of the time. However, it is still apparent that the parent conference is the job for which the teacher feels least well prepared by course work and training. This finding is supported by several

responses to the question "What skills would you like to improve for more effective parent-teacher conferencing?"

"Skill in asking more open-ended questions...  
offering motivational and discipline techniques to parents when they ask for them...  
being in control."

"Develop more awareness of needs/problems."

"Ways to lessen tension/hostility that sometimes blocks all effective communication."

"Listening and interpreting."

Teachers need and recognize their need, however, currently, teacher preparation offers little or no training in conducting parent-teacher conferences. Teachers are often left to their own devices in learning about and conducting such conferences.

It is my recommendation that special training and course work be provided the teacher and would-be teacher emphasizing those skills of preparation, attending, respect, empathy, negotiation, and tolerance. Specifically (1) college education courses in parent-teacher conferencing techniques, (2) beginning and advanced counseling classes to be required of potential teachers, (3) all-school in-service training for teachers in conferencing skills, (4) in-house training or help where an experienced teacher or counselor sits in with the teacher needing help, and (5) a handbook of conferencing skills to direct teachers as to directions a conference should take, goals, time limits, and other helpful information.

These recommendations stated above are only the beginning, but a start in improving the all important relationship between parents

and teacher.

Concluding Remarks

The parent-teacher relationship is an important one in determining and maintaining a student's success in school. The skills of preparation, attending, respect, empathy, negotiation, and toleration go a long way in achieving that success. Parent and teacher, working together as a team, honestly, openly, and with respect of one another, developing a mutual plan - the end to be that which is best for the student.

APPENDIX A  
INTRODUCTORY LETTER



The California  
State University

September 1984

Dear Teacher,

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Education: Counseling Option, Marlene Fritz, under the guidance of Dr. Margaret Cooney of California State University in San Bernardino, requests information obtained from this questionnaire to incorporate into her Master's Project.

Your responses are particularly desirable because of your experiences as a classroom teacher and in conducting parent-teacher conferences.

It would be appreciated if you would complete the questionnaire as other phases of this project cannot be carried out until completion and analysis of the survey data. Any additional comments or questions you may have concerning any aspect of parent-teacher conferences or this survey will be welcome. Your responses will be held in the strictest confidence and you are welcome to withdraw from the survey at any time.

Thank you for your cooperation and feel free to contact me at the address below.

Sincerely yours,

Marlene Fritz  
Darmstadt Middle School  
APO New York 09175

APPENDIX B  
CONSENT FORM





The California  
State University

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
TELEPHONE (714) 887-7571

Consent Form

I understand that I am completing a questionnaire which will be used as part of a Master's Project being completed by Marlene Fritz, a student at California State University in San Bernardino.

Marlene Fritz has my permission to use my questionnaire in her study, and I understand that my responses will be held in the strictest confidence. I also understand that I may ask Marlene Fritz questions at any time about the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX C  
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

## TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

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Before the conference, how often do you...

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Write down the reasons and topics to be covered in the conference | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Collect supportive data (files, student's work, tests)            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Provide a private place for the conference                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

During the conference, how often do you...

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. Lean forward   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Maintain eye contact   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Ask open-ended questions   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Provide comfortable chairs   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Eliminate barriers such as a desk or table between the parents and the teacher | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Start the conference on a positive note  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Become aware of the parent's fears and concerns                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Ask the parents for information about the child                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Make a concerted effort to welcome the parents and make them feel at ease     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Allow for parents to offer suggestions  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Work with the parents to develop a plan of action                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Communicate your concerns to the parent                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Have an enjoyable conference  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please take a few minutes to answer the following discussion questions.

1. The most important goal I would like to have a parent-teacher conference accomplish is...
  
2. What skills would you like to improve for more effective parent-teacher conferencing?
  
3. What suggestions or comments would you offer as ways to meet the challenge of facilitating more effective parent-teacher conferences?

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